

Decentralised Natural Resources Management in the Chiredzi District of Zimbabwe: Voices from the Ground

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Forest context and decentralisation in Zimbabwe

- Zimbabwe forests are part of the dry forest zone which is characterised by miombo woodlands
- 3 categories of forest tenure:
 - 1) State forests – managed by the state
 - 2) Woodlands on small scale commercial farms are privately owned and managed
 - 3) Communal Areas (CA) and Resettlement Areas (RA) – post Independence land redistribution policy

History of decentralisation initiatives in Zimbabwe

- Varied depending on the tenurial status of the land on which resources are found
- Large championed by the government and other external actors
 - Resource sharing programs around state forests
 - 1984 creation of Rural District Council and and Village Development Committees (VIDCOS) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOS)
 - Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) initiative

The Chizvirizvi Case: reversing the norm

Historical background: Land tenure and settlement

- Colonial era -land and resource alienation – creation of Gonarezhou national park and Malilangwe conservancy
- War period –protected villages, military buffer zone, minimize conflict
- Independence period –reconstruction and development through resettlement- 6 acre plots
- Present –self-contained 85 ha plots

The long walk to “freedom”

- Concern about congestion and environmental degradation
- Emergence of visionaries among the communities
- Building tactical partnerships with relevant government departments, the traditional leaderships, neighboring Malilangwe conservancy, consulting the provincial governor and the vice president for approval
- Financial aid and technical support from Malilangwe and government departments
- The Land allocation process – use of tags, initial reluctance, allocation to civil servants and 2002 war vets
- Intra and inter-plot conflicts
- Unfinished business of title deeds, appropriate authority over wildlife; parity between tax collected and services provided by the RDC

Experiences & Discussion

- For decentralisation to be successful it should be relevant- salience of issue at stake, collective will is important
- Taxation within a decentralised setting, community has asserted its interest in wildlife
- Decentralisation in one area can give the community a lever to stake their interests in other areas: Wildlife management within a decentralised setting – conferment of appropriate authority over wildlife on the community
- Institutions at the local level – decentralisation can result in overcrowding of the institutional landscape and conflicts are inevitable- empower existing ones

Conclusion

- Even if communities are armed with a clear road map of how they can initiate decentralisation processes at the local level, local communities can not go it alone-they still need support from external organisations even from the RDC from whom they are trying to wrestle power.

Experiences & Discussion

- Need mechanism to resolve conflicts
- Alliances with external actors - still necessary even in decentralized settings
- What is the silver bullet to our success?
Local leadership? Support?